By Liam Timmins

Transmitting across the globe with the Shannon Basin Radio Club, Ballinasloe locals have been partaking in amateur radio transmissions and organising events in town to promote their hobby.

Founded in the 1970's as the 'Midlands Radio Club', the station currently encompasses the Shannon Basin between Limerick City and Northern Ireland, as well as including those overseas in the US. Their club hosts 50 members old and young, transmitting from their station in Roscommon identified by their callsign 'EI2SBC'.

Among their team is Ballinasloe-based Anthony Dolan, the club's Treasurer. Early in his years Anthony would spend his nights in his garage chatting with friends in town and further afield through his license-free CB Radio. He often even communicated with stations in the US.

The young operator did a night course in Garbally College and after passing the exam and earning his license, he began to design and build his station. Since then, Anthony has been operating with the local club alongside fellow Ballinasloe-area members Fr. Niall Foley, Padraig Naughton and Chairman Patrick O'Connor.

Club Safety Advisor Tom Nevin with Nenagh-based Club Treasurer Anthony Dolan

The club's EI2SBR Repeater located in Sliabh Bawn, Co Roscommon

Shannon Basin Radio is affiliated with the Irish Radio Transmitters Society, which itself is affiliated with the International Amateur Radio Union incorporating over 160 national groups representing the hobby.

Rather than your typical Galway Bay FM broadcast, these operators use radio signals ranging from long wave to microwave frequencies to connect with likeminded operators locally and around the world. They also compete in competitions and have their stations ready for communication in times of emergency. They typically experiment with homemade and commercial equipment to develop their knowledge and communication skills.

The local group take part in field day contests from the Garbally College grounds, and often demonstrate basic radio operations to Irish Scout groups helping them to contact each other over air. They were also involved in setting up communications between the international space station and a school in Athlone.

National competitions are hosted year-round along with an international "Islands on the air" contest from the island of Inishbofin, testing their operating skills by contacting as many stations on other islands around the world as possible in a given timeframe. Our own Pat O'Connor, as well as being the Shannon Basin Club President, is himself a World Champion contester in the hobby.

Shortly the Irish Radio Transmitters Society will have their AGM and rally on Saturday April 13 and Sunday April 14, hosted for its second year by the Shannon Basin branch in the Shearwater Hotel. Scheduled for the weekend are workshops, talks, a GALA dinner, raffle and more.

On the Sunday, their rally will bring visitors across the country and UK to buy and sell radio equipment. Meanwhile the club will also be broadcasting from the Shearwater through their station setup. Admission is €5, and all are welcomed to come along and meet the local members (including Anthony and Pat) on the day.

Anyone interested in radio and technology as a hobby are welcome to join the club, with details on their website www.sbrc.ie or their Facebook page.

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